England, Charles II. King 698.i.15 4

THE DANGER OF REPEALING THE TEST-ACT:

IN A

LETTER

TO

A MEMBER of PARLIAMENT,

FROM

A COUNTRY FREEHOLDER.

England:- Laws & Statutes - VIII [25 Cha II c 2]

Assentatores publicos, plebicolas istos, vestrâ vos causâ incitare et stimulare putatis. Concitati, aut honori aut quæstui illis estis: et, quia, in concordiâ ordinum, nullos se usquam esse vident, malæ rei se quam nullius, turbarum ac seditionum, duces esse volunt.

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THE

DANGER OF REPEALING

THE

TEST-ACT.

SIR,

THE ſubject of this Addreſs will carry along with it, I hope, its own apology. The diſſenting miniſters, in moſt parts of the kingdom, have publicly avowed an intention of *dictating* to their repreſentatives, upon that great national queſtion which is my preſent ſubject. I claim no ſuch privilege; I only beg leave to lay my ſentiments before you, and ſhall then leave you to your own judgment, which I have no right to abridge or controul.

The reſpectable body of men I have juſt mentioned, have been forming Aſſociations

and (what is more alarming ſtill, as being a meaſure of *American* complexion) Committees of Correſpondence, with a fixed intention of laying their repreſentatives under an explicit and ſolemn promiſe of repealing the Corporation and Teſt Acts.

Struck with the novelty and boldneſs of the deſign, I ſoon determined to lay aſide, for awhile, ſome other ſpeculations, which were more agreeable to my taſte and habits, and to enquire what great evils they were which excited this violent ferment, and indeed theſe unconſtitutional proceedings, among a people, who, by their profeſſion, are the miniſters of peace, and, by example and precept, ſhould be the teachers of modeſty, moderation, contentment, and every civil virtue.

I call their proceedings *unconſtitutional*; becauſe the circumſtance of *delegation*, I conceive, robs not the repreſentative of his own natural right of private judgment. An unconditional promiſe, upon any diſputable point, takes this away. The repreſentative cannot, with ſtrict probity, promiſe his voice, before he has heard a point fairly and fully debated. Even his own prejudices, and moſt decided opinions, ſhould be ſuſpended (as far as ſelf-eſteem admits of impartiality) until he has fully and candidly heard what the advocates on the other ſide can ſay or urge. An honeſt judgment

is

is the reſult of the matureſt deliberation, after the freeſt and ampleſt diſcuſſion.

I preſume then only to lay my ſentiments before you, as one of your Conſtituents. I know many of my neighbours who agree with me moſt cordially in opinion. But I wiſh to form no parties, no cabals: I leave you to your own free determination hereafter, and preſume to think, that my particular courſe of ſtudies has brought ſome things to my knowledge, which may poſſibly have eſcaped your notice. The ſubject has more of theology in it than ſtateſmen can be generally ſuppoſed to know, amidſt their great variety of political objects.

When I heard the loud outcries raiſed againſt theſe acts, and ſaw them circulated and re-echoed through the kingdom, with the moſt unremitting induſtry, not only in pamphlets but in the common *news-papers*, which diffuſe intelligence through all circles and places, even down to country hedge-alehouſes; I immediately began to conceive, that theſe acts muſt be ſomething exceedingly ſanguinary or oppreſſive, ſomething like the edicts of a Nero or a Dioclefian, threatening the general deſtruction of religion; or, like the bulls of ſome furious Pope, commiſſioning and commanding a general cruſade againſt ſome innocent

people, who were ſo unhappy as not to ſee his holineſs's infallibility in the ſcriptures, where there is not a ſyllable about him to be found, and no ſpiritual head is mentioned or ſuppoſed, but the divine Author of our religion.

Theſe were my firſt conceptions, for the outcries were loud indeed; the reſolutions of the diſſenting miniſters entered into no particulars; and the pamphlets * which I ſaw, detailed the text only by piece-meal, juſt as it anſwered the purpoſes of the authors, and, with the uſual laboured obſcurity of commentators, darkened and embarraſſed the text with unmeaning and incoherent obſervations.†

This induced me to look into the Statutes themſelves, and the hiſtory of the cotemporary

* The pamphlet which I ſhall chiefly conſider at preſent is called, *The Right of Proteſtant Diſſenters to a compleat Toleration; by a Layman.* It is conſidered, it ſeems, by the diſſenting miniſters as a very valuable production; for a large meeting of them, lately held, voted the author their thanks in the moſt public manner, *nem. con.*

† He profeſſes to ſhow the injuſtice, inexpediency, and folly of the ſacramental-teſt, (a heavy charge, if it could be proved;) and yet he perplexes the reader with, what he calls, An Hiſtorical Account of the Teſt-Laws, a long tireſome work, which miſdates and miſtates facts, and proves nothing but the author's cordial diſlike to all men and things which ſuit not his humour or notions.

Had he employed his acknowledged abilities in the happier purpoſe of ſhowing how the diſſenters could have been admitted to more civil privileges *without* endangering the eſtabliſhment, I would have burnt this right-hand before I would have employed it againſt them.

porary tranſactions, and to ſee things with my own eyes; and great, very great indeed, was my amazement, when I found that theſe two were very neceſſary acts of our legiſlature, paſt in great and perilous emergencies, in the reign of the ſecond Charles; that they hurt not even their immediate objects, either in their perſons or poſſeſſions; and that the very wiſe and virtuous parliament which made that ſubſequent act of united policy and humanity, the TOLERATION ACT, ſaw it neceſſary to continue theſe two reſtrictive ſtatutes, amidſt all their moderation and benevolence of views;—nay, that the parliament under the fifth of George I. after the turbulent days of Ann were over, allowed not diſſenting magiſtrates to abuſe the generoſity of their country ſo far, *as to go to meeting houſes with the enſigns of office.*

The acts are theſe, as abridged by Judge Blackſtone:

By the former, "No perſon can be legally elected to any office, relating to the "government of any city or corporation, "unleſs, within a twelvemonth before, he "has received the Sacrament of the Lord's "Supper according to the rites of the "church of England; and he is alſo required to take the oaths of allegiance and "ſupremacy;

" ſupremacy; or, in default of either of " theſe requiſites, ſuch election ſhall be " void." The other, called the Teſt-Act, directs " all officers, civil and military, " to take the oaths, and make the decla- " ration againſt tranſubſtantiation, with- " in ſix months after their admiſſion; and " alſo within the ſame time to receive the " Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, accord- " ing to the uſage of the church of Eng- " land, in ſome public church, immedi- " ately after divine ſervice and ſermon, " upon forfeiture of 500*l.* and diſability to " hold the ſame office."

Preambles (the lawyers tell us) are the great window that lets light in upon the ſenſe of ſtatutes; and the preamble to the Corporation-Act will acquaint us, that it was founded in neceſſity. It was enacted, in the beginning of Charles the Second's reign, to repreſs that factious ſpirit which had been engendered, nurſed, and matured principally in boroughs, and overturned the conſtitution in the preceding reign; and was beginning again to operate with its uſual activity of intrigue and virulence. For the preamble ſtates the purpoſe to be, *that the ſucceſſion in corporations may be moſt probably perpetuated in the hands of perſons well affected to his Majeſty and the eſtabliſhed government; it being too well known that not-*

notwithſtanding all his Majeſty's endeavours and unparalleled indulgence in pardoning all that is paſt, nevertheleſs EVIL SPIRITS ARE STILL WORKING.*

And the Teſt-Act was made in the latter end of his reign, when (as cotemporary hiſtorians inform us) the whole nation was alarmed with the danger of a popiſh ſucceſſor; preparing, with the blindeſt and moſt headlong bigotry, to do that voluntarily, amidſt the general remonſtrances and execrations of an indignant people, which nothing but the moſt urgent and abſolute neceſſity extorted from King John, in the darkeſt period of ſuperſtition—to lay his crown at the Pope's feet, and court a vaſſalage, from which the wiſdom and ſpirit of our anceſtors had emancipated this prieſt-ridden kingdom.

And indeed this is ſufficiently apparent from the general ſpirit of Engliſh legiſlation, which (ſome call it folly, I call it lenity) ſeldom or never provides againſt evils,

* He takes a deal of laughable pains to prove that the Corporation Act was not aimed at the Preſbyterians; and his reaſon is, they occaſionally conformed. Againſt whom then was it levelled? Not Churchmen; that requires no proof: Not Papiſts; they had no weight in corporations. It muſt then have been againſt men of the author's principles, Browniſts, Independents, Baptiſts, Fifth-monarchy-men, and others of the kind, call them what you pleaſe. A turbulent ſpirit muſt again have begun to operate, before the parliament (which this author allows himſelf to have been cautious) had given the King's commiſſioners ſuch large powers as we find they were inveſted with.

evils, until they have appeared and wrought ſome miſchief *; and, in the ſame manner, the executive power conſiders, with parental tenderneſs, many of the penal laws as ſo many rods hung up, rather to intimidate than to puniſh; ſeldom proceeding to violence, till urged by the repetition or dangerous tendency of tranſgreſſion.

Now the firſt maxims of policy tell us, that laws muſt continue in force as long as their cauſes or objects exiſt; and conſequently that the Corporation and Teſt Acts ſhould continue as long as the tempers and principles continue which they were deſigned to reſtrain. To repeal them in ſuch a ſtate of things, would be the folly of removing the dikes and mounds that guard a cultivated land from the ravages of the lawleſs ocean; — a ſcriptural image, by the way, for the madneſs of a people in certain circumſtances.

The Papiſts (it is ſo at leaſt with the Engliſh Papiſts) repoſe a moſt unreſerved implicit confidence in their prieſts; reading nothing but what they allow, ſeeing only with their eyes, and hearing only with their ears, in matters of religion; believing even that

* Whoever takes the pains of comparing the dates of the acts made againſt the papiſts with the cotemporary hiſtorians, will find, that there is not one enacted againſt them but what they drew upon their own heads by ſome previous outrage. And yet theſe, ſevere as they were, were never executed with rigor. *Biſhop Gibſon.*

that the prieſt's *intention* is neceſſary to give efficacy to their religious ſervices. Prieſts are ſtill under the moſt ſtrict and ſolemn vows or oaths of obedience to the ſee of Rome; the Pope has not yet renounced his inſolent pretenſions to univerſal empire; and it is impoſſible to account for the proſelyting ſpirit that pervades his adherents, without ſuppoſing that a return of the ſame golden days of power is a favourite tenet in their creed.

And as for the Diſſenters, whom I conſider and embrace as my brethren, (eſpecially when I conſider the great power and influence of the papal chair, even in its preſent tottering ſtate of temporal juriſdiction) I lament to ſee, both in their writings and converſation, that they are farther removed than ever from the eſtabliſhment. Would to God we could be united againſt ſuch an inſidious and powerful adverſary as Rome is! But wiſhes are impotent where determined parties are formed; and the repeal of the acts now under conſideration, in particular, will be ſo far from producing this happy union, that it will create new and very ſerious cauſes of competition, contention, and (according to Dr. Prieſt-

ley's wiſhes) ſome great *convulſion* in the ſtate.*

The only pertinent arguments for the repeal of the two acts under conſideration, which I ever heard or ſaw, are theſe:

That theſe two laws make an odious diſtinction between fellow-proteſtants, who are united in the ſame cauſe of religious liberty, and ſhould be united in the cloſeſt bonds of amity;

That they deprive the ſtate of the ſervices of ſome of its beſt citizens;

That they deprive theſe valuable citizens of their birth-right;

That they are attended with a ſuperior weight of inconveniences in their operation;

And that they are a temptation to unprincipled men to profane a very ſolemn ordinance of religion.

The firſt I ſhall anſwer more fully by and by. At preſent it will be ſufficient to ſay, that if theſe laws make an odious diſtinction, it cannot be helped. The welfare of the ſtate requires that there muſt be ſome eſtabliſhed religion, at leaſt againſt popery; a compact, deep-laid, active ſyſtem of policy, that muſt prevail

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* In moſt of his violent publications, Letter to Mr. Pitt, Treatiſe on Education, &c.

again if that bulwark of proteſtaniſm, the Church of England, be deſtroyed, and our houſe be divided againſt itſelf.

The ſecond is, that the ſervices of many valuable members are loſt to the community by theſe reſtrictions. But it is time enough to urge this objection when there is a ſcarcity of able men to fill the various departments of the community. At preſent our ſeveral lines and avenues to preferment are crouded, there are more candidates than places. If lay-diſſenters will take the ſame road with their fellow-citizens it is well; but let them ſubmit to the ſame conditions. The Oath of Allegiance, for inſtance, is always and juſtly required for the preſervation of the firſt magiſtrate's ſupremacy. What hardſhip is it, that they are required to pay ſome act of deference to the religion of the ſtate, as ſome ſort of ſecurity for its preſervation (as long as it ſhall be thought worth preſervation); and as ſome call upon their conſciences to think ſeriouſly of that *righteouſneſs*, that general ſpirit of piety and morals, *which is the exaltation of any nation*, and which, it is preſumed, the diſſenters will allow is tolerably taught in the liturgy and ſermons of the Church of England.

The third is, that it deprives good citizens of their birth-right. I could wiſh to ſee this ſounding word properly aſcertained; but I cannot find, for my part, that man is born abſolutely free into any community. At his firſt entrance, he comes a dependent ſubject to the laws from which he receives protection. As he grows up, he continues under their protection; and he owes them deference, reſpect, and obedience, until the general ſenſe of the community ſees it neceſſary to alter or improve them. As well may the farmer talk of his birth-right to his landed neighbour's eſtates, or the poor artiſan to his rich employer's profits and returns in buſineſs. The lines that divide theſe, and a thouſand others in ſimilar circumſtances, are founded in the conſtitution of ſociety. If religion, in its uſe and abuſe, eſſentially affects ſociety (as the hiſtory of mankind ſhows it does) it alſo admits and requires the civil magiſtrate's interference, as the ſuperintendant of order and the general welfare. To talk of birth-right in oppoſition to general regulations of this kind, is the wild language of ſavage nature.*

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* The author enters into the *rationale* of things only here; proper reſpect therefore ſhall be paid to him; he ſhall ſpeak for himſelf: "Man,

The fourth is, that the operation of theſe laws is attended with intolerable inconveniences.

" Man, ſays he, in a ſtate of nature, is poſſeſſed of many rights; ſome of which he gives up entirely, and in others he ſuffers himſelf to be controlled when he enters into ſociety. Of the latter ſort the right of ſelf-defence is an inſtance; it is never wholly loſt, but is ſuſpended only ſo long as the good of the public requires, and as the community at large affords protection to the individual. Whenever the danger is ſo preſſing and immediate that no aſſiſtance can be derived from ſociety, there the natural right of ſelf-defence revives, and force may be repelled by force. But there are other rights, which no man can reſign even to civil ſociety; no man can ſubject his opinions in religious matters to the magiſtrate; for he is intruſted by the Great Author of his being with the exerciſe of his mental faculties in this reſpect; and his conduct in this truſt, in a ſtate of ſociety as well as nature, is merely a perſonal concern between each individual and the God who made him."

This is the whole that is given us by the author in the way of reaſoning upon the ſubject of *right*. Some natural rights, he ſays, are *wholly* given up, ſome *partially*, ſome *not at all*. Now in all diſtributions the *ſpecific difference*, as we call it, or the diſcriminating circumſtance, is, or ſhould be, mentioned. But this circumſtance is only mentioned before the laſt, that it is a *truſt* and a *perſonal* concern; and, unfortunately for this author's credit as a logician, it belongs to all as well as the laſt. Is not ſelf-preſervation, are not all our faculties, and the fruits and acquiſitions of our faculties, all *truſts* and *perſonal* concerns as well as conſcience? Perſonal concerns for our own uſe, and truſts for the benefit of our neighbours around us, and the glory of the Divine Giver. This is the language of reaſon as well as religion.

He is alſo wrong in another view. I can recollect *nothing* which an individual reſigns to the magiſtrate *wholly*, *abſolutely*, and *unconditionally*; but *conditionally* he reſigns *every thing*, *mental* and *corporeal*. As the exerciſe of *ſelf-defence* is in general reſigned for the ſake of peace, but revives

conveniences. The author I often quote, dwells with much complacency, and employs whole pages upon this topic. But many are exaggerated; ſome have no exiſtence but in his own imagination.* There can be no law without ſome attendant inconveniences; and the indulgent wiſdom of our legiſlature provides an annual remedy for involuntary offences in the preſent caſe. If there are any defects in the law, as it now ſtands, they are a proof only that they ought to be altered, not repealed.

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vives in emergencies; ſo the exerciſe of the mind, as to education, inſtruction and direction, is reſigned, until emergencies ariſe, when God is to be obeyed rather than man.

Thus, univerſal obedience is due to the magiſtrate; but, when he violates the conditions of the ſocial compact, it revives; and only then revives. So our poſſeſſions and the fruits of our labours are our own, and the magiſtrate's under certain conditions: theſe being not diſcharged on his part, our right revives whole and unreſerved, and we ſtand upon our own defence.

Our minds, of all things, belong moſt to the magiſtrate's care; becauſe without it there could be no education, no inſtruction, no means of carrying on the cultivation of the human underſtanding (for they are too expanſive and complicated to be within the reach or ſphere of unaided individuals); and thus man muſt grow up and continue in all the rude ignorance of nature.

Theſe people talk of the rights of conſcience as if it were a ſelf-enlightened, ſelf-ſufficient principle; and deſigned to provide for another world without regard to the peace and comfort of the preſent. Strange!

* Thus he brings the ſellers of ale and the reverend diſtributors of the *regium donum* (of which more hereafter) within the laſh of the Teſt. P. 45, &c.

The fifth is, that theſe laws encourage the unprincipled to profane a ſacred ordinance of religion.* The time was when I lamented this as a ſerious evil. The rubric of the church, I thought, empowered the miniſter to refuſe the ſacrament to the notoriouſly unworthy; and yet I conceived that an action would lie againſt him if he rejected any one, whatever his moral character was, who was qualifying himſelf for an office. Here I thought the miniſter laid under a very diſagreeable and cruel dilemma. But maturer thought has altered my opinion. The conſideration of worthineſs and unworthineſs is a point that lies between God and a man's own conſcience. The miniſter's buſineſs is to inſtruct and admoniſh: The guilt of profanation belongs to the unworthy communicant. The miniſter, ignorant as he is not only of the hearts but of the *ſecret lives* of mankind, cannot diſcriminate between the good and bad; and, if he could, it is a power not to be truſted to him, unleſs we

* It is a wonder whence the layman conceived ſuch a regard for the eſtabliſhed clergy, as to employ a whole chapter (p. 65) in commiſerating their condition. The biſhops, however, cannot be included; for he hates them as perſecutors. "Whatever they may ſay *individually*," ſays he, "yet biſhops, *as* biſhops, are all perſecutors." A very candid ſort of a writer!

we inveſt him too (as the Pope inveſts his emiſſaries) with *impeccability*.*

I content myſelf with theſe ſhort, and, I think, ſufficient anſwers to the arguments alledged in favour of the propoſed repeal.

I enter now upon a wider field, and will demonſtrate, as I believe, (refuting the other arguments as they come in my way) that the ſcheme has the ſubverſion of our eſtabliſhment in view as its ultimate object; that, if it ſucceeds, it will probably have this effect at no very diſtant period of time; that the conſequences of ſuch a general convulſion may be pronounced, without a ſpirit of propheſy, fatal to the intereſts of the Proteſtant religion, at leaſt in this kingdom; and that, if we muſt have any new acts of legiſlation with reſpect to religion, the encouragement of it as a practical ſyſtem of ſocial duties, is the only object becoming an enlightened legiſlature.

I have the ſincereſt reſpect for the Diſſenters, as my fellow-proteſtants and fellow-citizens, actuated as they are with a true zeal, becoming Britons, both for civil and religious liberty; but as they mix,

* The neceſſity of the prieſt's *intention* to give efficacy to their ſacraments, is taught among the firſt principles of their religion to young children.

mix, I think, too much of a democratical ſpirit with their idea of civil liberty, and too great a love of novelty and change in their idea of religious liberty, I muſt wiſh (with the caution of the honeſt old Whigs) to uſe their zeal rather as a *miniſterial* than a *leading* principle in our mixed conſtitution; and therefore I ſhall ever oppoſe them; with temper indeed, as brethren, but with firmneſs, as erring brethren, according to the beſt view of things, which I can at preſent poſſibly obtain, either from reading or obſervation.

Human nature is the ſame in all men, diverſified only with particular modifications from particular circumſtances. I ſuppoſe then (ſaints only excepted) that all men would prefer an affluent to a ſcanty fortune, a ſettled competence to a fluctuating precarious maintenance.

Led by this obſervation, I cannot help thinking that Diſſenting Miniſters in general would rather enjoy ſuch a ſettled competence, as churchmen in their opinion now poſſeſs, than depend upon the good-will, or rather the humour and caprice, of congregations; and that, therefore, they cannot be ſerious in declaiming againſt eſtabliſhments univerſally *as* eſtabliſhments. Perhaps a few of them are ſo

attached to the cauſe of *pure truth*, (as they call it) that they would rather die than ſubmit to any *human* authority but *their own*. But theſe are the ſaints whom I before excepted. In general, it may be conſidered as an uncontroulable truth, founded in the ſtrongeſt neceſſities and inſtincts of nature, that moſt of theſe people would prefer an independent competence to their preſent uncertain proviſion. I can upon no other principle account for their zeal upon the preſent occaſion. They are moving heaven and earth to effect their purpoſe.

What can be the aim of theſe violent, theſe unconſtitutional proceedings? Why, it is to remove two acts of parliament, in which they are no more intereſted, according to all *immediate* appearances, than the inhabitants of the moon. Theſe acts exclude lay-diſſenters from corporate offices of power, and from civil and military poſts. What is this to Diſſenting Miniſters? They can be no candidates for theſe things: Their very profeſſion is their excluſion. At the ſame time, their interference was not wanted; their lay-brethren could ſpeak, and write, and act for themſelves: the beſt performance upon the ſubject is by a profeſſed lay-diſſenter. Surely, the mere love of truth

cannot

cannot account for the appearance, the very aukward indecent appearance, of the *Drum Eccleſiaſtic* upon this occaſion.

It is poſſible, and probable, indeed, that many honeſt men among them may not be aware of the bias under which they act. Well-diſpoſed perſons often are drawn aſide by the *obliquity* of party, and inadvertently aim at ends, which they avow not to themſelves, nor perhaps ſee. This at leaſt is plain, if the mortified ſelf-denying ſaints of the laſt century diſliked not livings at the expence of many an ejected ſtarving churchman, the inheritors of their zeal cannot diſlike them in theſe days of higher refinement and freer and yet innocent indulgence, amidſt the elegancies of an improved civilization.

This argument is drawn from a juſt ſource of reaſoning, *Analogy*. The next ſhall be drawn from *Fact*. What think you of the views of men, who uſe ſpecious arguments, adapted to other men's notions or prejudices, but contrary to their own perſuaſions? One of the capital arguments uſed by them and their great advocate, Mr. Beaufoy, is a tender regard for the honour of religion; that is, for the honour of the Church of England (for no other religion is concerned

in the profanation of its ſolemn ordinance) and yet this is the church, which, upon all other occaſions, is the conſtant ſubject of their cavils and reproaches! *Victory*, not *truth*, muſt be the object of ſuch fallacious declamation.

They tell us, with ſtill greater ſelf-contradiction, in order to puzzle the queſtion and help on deception, that religion lies not within the province of the magiſtrate; a propoſition, partly true and partly falſe. But the proper conſequence of it, delivered in this ambiguous manner, undefined and unaſcertained, is, that Jews, Mahometans, Papiſts, Deiſts, Atheiſts, people of all perſuaſions and no perſuaſions, have a right to any offices of the community. The magiſtrate (ſay they) has nothing to do with profeſſed principles, but *actions*. According to this rule, any of thoſe claſſes juſt mentioned, have a right of admiſſion to any truſts of power or authority, until they have diſcovered in the very expreſſive effective language of actions, that they are unfit for their poſts and truſts. But what will this do? The miſchief is already done: theſe improper and dangerous perſons are got into full power of exerciſing their hoſtile intentions. *Ubi hôc exemplo gladium eduxerint, quis illi finem ſtatuet, aut quis*

quis moderabitur? At leaſt, if they are ſincere in their profeſſions, why do they not purſue truth to its full extent of beneficial operation, take the Romaniſts by the hand (it is too great an honour to call them the Catholics) and get a repeal of the ſeveral laws enacted againſt them, and, with the true ſpirit of liberality, generouſly lead them along with themſelves to one promiſcuous harveſt, amidſt the profits and honours of the ſtate?

But this I know they mean not: they are too ſincere and zealous Proteſtants to truſt profeſſed Papiſts with power. Nay, they glory in the merit of having contributed conſiderably to the eſtabliſhment of the Teſt-Act in its original direction againſt Papiſts; they now only lament that they had not ſecured ſome privileges to themſelves in reward for their ſervices. Is there the fairneſs and ingenuity of plain dealing in uſing an argument to ſerve a preſent purpoſe, which, in its proper extent, militates ſo fully againſt their own ideas of political ſecurity?*

You will be aſtoniſhed, Sir, I think, at what I am going to mention: For I ſuppoſe it has been out of your way to know

* This is the language of the *very conſiſtent* Layman, p. 15, and in other places.

know the difference between the Diſſenters and us with reſpect to the ſacrament. The only difference is, that they chuſe to receive it ſitting, we kneeling. Both agree about the eſſentials of this ordinance; both agree that the devotion of the *mind* is the moſt acceptable part in all acts of worſhip; both agree too, at leaſt in this enlightened age, that bodily poſtures are *indifferent* circumſtances. And yet, in this enlightened age, the Diſſenting Miniſters are ſounding the *Drum Eccleſiaſtic*, as we ſaw before, through the whole nation, for the great purpoſe of relieving their lay-brethren from the intolerable neceſſity of receiving the ſacrament KNEELING, in the natural or cuſtomary poſture of ſupplication, not in their uſual mode of lazy recumbency; to receive it occaſionally as a mark of reſpect and reverence to the religion of an eſtabliſhment, that wiſhes to ſhow them every indulgence which is conſiſtent with ſelf-preſervation!

Pray, Sir, reflect. Did you before conceive, that men, who are always talking of liberal ſentiments, candor, and moderation, could ever act under ſuch a confined, rigid, uncomplying prejudice? Or can you now think, that ſuch an acknowledged

knowledged prejudice is to be let looſe upon a defenceleſs eſtabliſhment?

What would they have? Would they, when the eſtabliſhment is deſtroyed, ſtill depend upon voluntary ſocieties for ſuch a maintenance as they can obtain from them by their eloquence or humiliating ſubmiſſions? This bleſſing they have already; nay, in greater perfection than they will then, when the pride and conſequence of oppoſition and rivalſhip are no longer concerned in their ſupport. They have this bleſſing, I ſay, in its higheſt perfection; they have more; they have the liberty of preaching, ſaying, printing what they pleaſe; nobody moleſts them; nobody wiſhes to moleſt them. It is impoſſible to divine what their preſent motives can be, unleſs it be the unkind pleaſure of ſeeing the Miniſters of the eſtabliſhment reduced to the ſame dependent ſituation with themſelves, or the mean ſelfiſh proſpect of ſcrambling for a portion of their revenues amidſt the general *convulſion*, which Dr. Prieſtley piouſly prays for and expects.

I know not how it is; but, even at this very moment, when I am a little warmed (as it is natural) with my ſubject, I have a reſpect for the Diſſenters, not only for the reaſons I mentioned before,

ſore, but becauſe I ſee them acting juſt as, I ſuppoſe, I ſhould act in ſimilar circumſtances. Were I, by any perverſeneſs of fate or of choice, a perſon capable of diſturbing the peace of chriſtian ſocieties in purſuit of a phantom, an ideal abſoluteneſs of perfection, which neither human ſyſtems nor human characters admit of in this world of frailty, I ſtill could not lay aſide my natural appetites: I ſhould ſtill wiſh for meat, and drink, and cloaths for myſelf and family: I ſhould like a certainty of theſe things (as far as human life admits of certainty) while God continued my being upon this intriguing buſtling ſtage; I ſhould not even diſlike ſome of the ſweets of church preferments; I ſhould be almoſt tempted to envy Biſhops rolling about in their coaches, and Deans and Prebendaries lolling at their eaſe upon their velvet cuſhions: in ſhort, it would be but natural for me to wiſh ſome goodly portion among the jolly ſons of Levi, as I ſuppoſe I ſhould then view them through the unkind eye of jealous prejudice. At the ſame time two things are certain; that it is as natural for the ſons of Levi to ſtick faſt to their inheritance; and as natural for a wiſe legiſlature, preſiding over a great empire, to look down with neutral

tral indifference upon their *intereſted* ſquabbles; until they have reaſons to believe that eſtabliſhed order is of no uſe in ſociety, or that diviſions and ſtruggles for power are the ſtrength and bulwark of a ſtate, or that religion is all a farce, all impoſture and illuſion.

As the party againſt whom I am writing have not openly ſupported any of theſe points in any of their reſolutions or publications,* I ſhall take the contrary at preſent for granted, and now proceed to obſerve farther; that, as the propoſed repeal has the ſubverſion of the eſtabliſhment in view as its ultimate object, ſo will it probably, if it ſucceeds, have this effect at no very diſtant period of time.

Sir Robert Walpole's opinion of the Diſſenters' principles (for as men he eſteemed many of them) is pretty well known. They had been the ſtaunch thorough-paced ſupporters of his meaſures, and expected their *millenium* from his gratitude. He careſſed, he flattered them; he promiſed them from time to time a repeal of theſe obnoxious acts: but ſtill he

 cried,

* The Layman is for or againſt eſtabliſhments, juſt as it ſuits the purpoſe of his argument. He agrees with Mr. Paley, p. 50, that eſtabliſhments are neceſſary as a ſcheme of inſtruction; but, he ſays, p. 59, the Diſſenters have no ſcheme to propoſe; elſewhere his arguments militate againſt all eſtabliſhments

cried, it is not time yet: This time, like a fairy proſpect, was always near, always ſhifting. Wearied out at laſt with a long ſeries of flattering hopes and diſappointments, one of their leaders peremptorily demanded an anſwer, when he would perform his promiſes, when the proper time would come, to reward them for all their patriotic ſervices. "Never," (anſwered the wiſe ſtateſman, with an oath) "Ne-"ver, as long as I can prevent it; I know "you too well; you are not to be truſted "with power."*

It is to be hoped that our preſent parliament, which is following that great politician's ideas with regard to the Exciſe laws, will profit by his well-formed judgment with reſpect to the principles and tempers of the people, now ſoliciting, or rather rudely and inſolently demanding, their patronage.

It will be neceſſary now to review their conduct from the firſt eſtabliſhment of our Church under Elizabeth. It is amazing thoſe half-enlightened times could conceive

* The anecdote is true from the Layman's acknowledgment, p. 29. But, to throw duſt into the reader's eyes, he tells us, that Sir Robert and even the King were well inclined to their cauſe, but were over-ruled by ſome peculiar difficulties of the times—exiſting only in his imagination, and that of the milky ſweet-tempered writer of the *Confeſſional*, whom he quotes as his authority!

ceive ſo wiſe, ſo moderate, ſo temperate a ſyſtem of comprehenſion and accommodation.

Our reformers derived their orders indeed from the Divine Author of our religion, whoſe kingdom was not of this world; but they owned reverence and obedience to be due to the civil governors of their country for the peace, ſecurity, and maintenance, which they enjoyed by their protection and liberality. The intrepid ſpirit of that ſtrange compound of ſenſe and bigotry, generoſity and violence, Henry the Eighth, had freed them from the unnatural uſurpation of the Pope, had diſlodged thoſe *Janizaries* or *life-guards* of his, the Regular Clergy, diſperſed their wealth among the Laity, and laid the foundation of our preſent national opulence and importance.*

Elizabeth

* Dr. Burn, after fairly ſtating the advantages of Monaſteries, concludes thus:

"On the other hand, they were very injurious to the ſecular or parochial clergy; by taking to themſelves many prebends and benefices, by getting many churches appropriated to them, and penſions out of many others; and by the exemptions they got from the epiſcopal juriſdiction and from the payment of tithes. And they were no leſs injurious to the nation in general, by depriving the public of ſo many hands, which might have been very ſerviceable to it in trade and other employments; by greatly diminiſhing the number of people, in conſequence of the inſtitution of celibacy; and by their houſes or churches being ſanctuaries

Elizabeth wiſhed to purſue his plan of policy: Our reformers embraced it with pleaſure; and readily transferred their allegiance from a foreign uſurper and tyrant to the natural object of all allegiance in all well-ordered ſtates, the civil magiſtrate. In this they acted properly as good citizens; in religion, as temperate and well-informed divines.

They avoided all wanton innovations. They wiſhed to keep in communion with the Catholic or Univerſal Church. They conſidered Rome as a part of that Church, having not loſt one eſſential doctrine of Chriſtianity. But, as it had ſuperadded many groſs and even idolatrous corruptions, and exerciſed an inſupportable tyranny over the perſons and conſciences of mankind, which, inſtead of being reformed,

for almoſt all manner of offenders. And if the ſuperſtition had continued, and the zeal of eſtabliſhing religious inſtitutions had exerted itſelf with equal vigour to the preſent age; we ſhould by this time have been a nation of monks and friars, or probably have become a prey to ſome foreign invader."

The Papiſts act very unreaſonably in urging King Henry's motley character as an objection againſt the reformation. "Does God," (ſay they) "ever uſe bad men as his inſtruments in good cauſes?" I anſwer, the reſtoration of the Jews from the Babyloniſh captivity was a good cauſe, becauſe it was a neceſſary event in the counſels of providence to uſher our bleſſed Saviour into the World. Yet that reſtoration was effected by Cyrus, a heathen, who is mentioned with reſpect on this very account in the Prophets.

ed, were gloſſed over and enforced by a ſet of the Pope's creatures,* aſſembled at Trent, under the name of a General Council; a national reformation, independent of the ſame corrupt and enſlaving influence, became abſolutely neceſſary to the ſafety of the State, and the purity of Religion. Here, I ſay, our Reformers acted as temperate and well-informed Divines.

They knew this nation, like all other churches, both in earlier and later times, had been uſed to a Liturgy. The Miſſal, they found, had ſeveral forms, derived from the moſt uncorrupt ages. They took therefore from this liturgy, as well as others, and with wiſe ſelection, compiled one with ſuch purity of matter, and majeſtic ſimplicity of ſtile, as render it, at this very day, the admiration of the Critic; as it is a perfect Formulary of prayer and univerſal inſtruction to the pious and well-diſpoſed.

They were themſelves rather tinctured with Calviniſm, in conſequence of their exile under the bloody Mary; but they drew up the Articles relating to thoſe points of theology, with that generous latitude, that

* Every thing was fixed and ſettled at Rome, before it was brought before the Council; where the Pope's Legate preſided, and directed every thing of conſequence as he pleaſed. The authority of this Council is not acknowledged in France, and other Popiſh countries; but Engliſh Papiſts ſwallow it with implicit credulity.

that Catholics of all denominations might ſubſcribe them, if lovers of peace and order, with ſafe conſciences.* They conſidered juſtly, that one uniform mode of worſhip would be moſt conducive to the peace and order and harmony of the ſtate; and that the ſanction of the legiſlature could only give it a general prevalence. They therefore aſked and had this ſanction. And this was only aſking that authority which the Pope had tyrannically uſurped, and Chriſtian princes had ever exerciſed in their own kingdoms, and which belongs only to the Legiſlature of every country, and which it *ſhould* exerciſe, as an unalienable right of ſupremacy.

Under a church ſo calmly and wiſely conſtituted, who would ever imagine that any of her own children ſhould ever ſtart out of her own boſom, to accuſe her of a tendency to that Popery which ſhe reprobated ſo ſtrongly in her Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies? So ſtrongly, that a reconciliation between England and Rome, is as impoſſible as the union of light and darkneſs, fire and water, or any of the moſt heterogeneous principles in the compaſs

* The ſame differences prevail in the church of Rome, about Grace and Election, between the different orders; but break not peace, as they ought not to do, among Proteſtants.

paſs of nature! And yet, the forefathers of our preſent Diſſenters were the very people, who were capable of forming a ſeparation upon this ſtrange extravagant pretence!

The only thing to be lamented is, that our early reformers had no idea what the ſtrange diverſity of human judgment, the fury of paſſion, the intemperance of zeal, the innovating mutability of whim and caprice, could do in religion; they knew not too, that human ſyſtems cannot be perfect, and that the neareſt to perfection may degenerate, and by degrees loſe its proper purpoſes. But it was the fault of the times; not theirs. They were but juſt emerging from Popiſh darkneſs; and aimed at ſecuring themſelves againſt a return of the ſame evil days. They therefore eſtabliſhed no juſt latitude of diſſent, no freedom of enquiry or diſcuſſion; in ſhort, no toleration.

Some penal laws were enacted, with the uſual lenity of our government, by way of terror to the refractory. But mere terror rather inflames than checks certain ſpirits. Hence a partial, ineffective, irritating ſort of perſecution was the conſequence. Nothing but exterminating perſecutions, like the Pope's againſt the Waldenſes, or the perſecutions of China and Japan againſt the believers in the Pope's univerſal ſupremacy,

premacy, (that impudent pretenſion, which baniſhed Chriſtianity out of thoſe two empires): no perſecution, in ſhort, but what cruſhes the principles and abettors in one general ruin, fully anſwers the views of the bloody or politic perſecutor. But the natural lenity and humanity of the Engliſh nation admits of nothing ſo ſavage. Partial proceſſes, therefore, were inſtituted againſt the more riotous diſturbers of peace. But the ſufferers were conſidered as *martyrs*, and the contagion ſpread. *Rags of Popery* was the cry againſt the church, and prevailed. The art of extempore-prayer, ſet up by an Emiſſary of Rome,* (afterwards

* The man's name was Faithful Cummin, a Dominican Friar; his reward 2000 ducats.

I ſubjoin an extract from the Pope's Bull againſt Queen Elizabeth.

After premiſing "that the Higheſt has made the Biſhop "of Rome the ſole Prince over all people and all king-"doms, to pluck up, deſtroy, ſcatter, conſume, plant, "and build; he proceeds: We declare the aforeſaid Eli-"zabeth, being an Heretic, and a favourer of Heretics, "and her Adherents, to have incurred the ſentence of "Anathema, and to be cut off from the unity of the body "of Chriſt. And we declare her to be deprived of her "pretended title to the kingdom aforeſaid, and of all do-"minion, dignity and privilege whatſoever; and alſo the "nobility, ſubjects and people of the ſaid kingdom, and "all others, which have, in any ſort, ſworn unto her, to be "for ever abſolved from any ſuch oath, and all manner "of duty and obedience: And we command and interdict "all and every the noblemen, &c. that they preſume not "to

wards bountifully rewarded by the Pope, for his ingenious contrivance of ſetting Heretics by the ears) helped on the diſtemper; and, in one word, the early days of Elizabeth were not more harraſſed by the infernal attempts of Jeſuits, and other Popiſh aſſaſſins, againſt her crown and life, than her latter days were embittered by the ungovernable zeal of the firſt race of Proteſtant Diſſenters, the Puritans.

The reign of James enabled them to go on with more advantage. That weak monarch's *jure divino* dreams, and the flattery of his weak or corrupt divines, enabled them to march, with large and unſuſpected ſtrides, towards the confuſion at which they aimed. They united with their Fanaticiſm, pretty tolerable ideas of civil liberty. Liberty, (though not in the republican latitude they learned at Geneva, yet liberty) ever was and is congenial with the ſpirit of an Engliſhman. His ſoul revolts at the idea of arbitrary power. Abhorrence, therefore, of the ſervile doctrines encouraged at Court, made even Patriots join them. Falkland, Clarendon

" to obey her, or her monitions, mandates, and laws." " Given at Rome, 1570."

It is to be hoped, that the late indulgence granted by our Legiſlature to the Papiſts, may *gradually* open their eyes, and teach them to renounce ſuch an extravagant and impious claim of juriſdiction.

joined them. And when theſe great men, who, though they hated tyranny, yet dreaded anarchy and popular confuſion, retreated; it was too late. The Republicans were grown too ſtrong to need their aſſiſtance any longer. As miſchief ripens, agents and inſtruments will ſpring up with increaſing promptitude and alacrity of ſervice. Gradually helped on, therefore, with a ſucceſſive train of artifices, they proceeded to their own favourite lengths, deſtroyed the conſtitution, and erected their own ſyſtem of Fanaticiſm upon its ruins. All their merit, therefore, in this period, was that of puſhing Liberty, which the patriotiſm of the *nation* had already ſufficiently ſecured againſt the exorbitant claims of *prerogative*, to enormous exceſſes, of the moſt diſgraceful and ruinous conſequences.

Under the two next reigns, indeed, they boaſt of ſervices. But if they concurred in the Reſtoration, they did it reluctantly, when there was no other remedy for the national confuſion; and, when the Parliament could not allow them, as I ſuppoſe, a proper toleration, without injuſtice to thouſands of ſtarving Clergy, whom the diſſenting miniſters had diſpoſſeſſed of their livings; they fell a plotting again in boroughs, and drew upon themſelves the Corporation-act, as early as the ſecond or third year after the Reſtoration.

And

And if, again, they joined the nation againſt the Popiſh ſucceſſor, they were but purſuing their own ends, and fighting againſt a common enemy, from whom they could expect no mercy. From the Prince of Orange they had every reaſon to expect a proper liberty of conſcience. They obtained it; and the wiſh of every true Engliſhman ſince that time has been, not to abridge or impair it, but to keep it within ſuch bounds as are conſiſtent with order.

And one would have imagined, that the indulgence granted them in this wiſe and happy renovation of our conſtitution, would have contented them: for Holland itſelf, where William learned his notions of polity, admits not of two rival eſtabliſhments; it grants but toleration. But this, it ſeems, very ſoon was not thought ſufficient by our Diſſenters. Exceſſes, ſimilar to Sir Humphrey Edwyn's, the Diſſenting Lord-Mayor of London, who went to a Meeting-houſe in all his formalities, with the enſigns of his office, were daily practiſed, till the jealouſy of the High-church men was fired, paſſed the Schiſm-act, and proceeded to other violent meaſures, which nothing can juſtify, and I think nothing could have excited, but very improper and violent meaſures on the contrary ſide.

But, certainly, one would reaſonably have imagined, that ſuch mild counſels as have prevailed under the Brunſwick family, would have ſoftened them into pacific diſpoſitions; eſpecially, when the 5th of George the Firſt, (which repealed the Schiſm-act), intimated to them, at the ſame time, by forbidding magiſtrates from appearing at Diſſenting meeting-houſes with the enſigns of their office; "that a "mode of worſhip ſet up in oppoſition to "the national, when it is allowed to be "exerciſed in peace, ſhould be exerciſed "with decency, gratitude, and humi-"lity*."

But the *evil ſpirits* (ſpoken of in the Corporation-act) will always, it ſeems, *be working*. We ſaw before, how they were ſecretly plotting under Sir Robert Walpole's omnipotent adminiſtration. We ſaw before, his idea of their views and tempers. His ſucceſſors, it is preſumed, entertained the ſame ſentiments, particularly the amiable Mr. Pelham, than whom no one was more inclined to extend liberty, as far as it was compatible with order.

What gives them now, under George the Third, the confidence which appears in their proceedings, is beyond my comprehenſion,

* Sir William Blackſtone's obſervation.

prehenſion, placed as I am at a diſtance from authentic intelligence. Some ſay, it is the loſs of the *regium donum*,* which the headlong temerity of Lord Bute ſtripped them of. I wiſh it were reſtored to them, or more. There are many reſpectable and uſeful men in their miniſtry. They are formed into a party, and muſt and will perſiſt. The church is full, and, upon the whole, as I ſhall ſhow by and by, is poor; and, though I think an actual ſeparation no more neceſſary for the preſervation of religious liberty, than an *actual rebellion* for the preſervation of civil liberty, yet they are uſeful in more reſpects than it is neceſſary for me to enumerate.

But whatever be their motives, they are now taking unexampled liberties. Their leading teachers tell us (and leaders generally form the principles of a ſect) that the repeal of the Teſt-Acts will not ſatisfy them: they *will* have more privileges, as their birth-right: They are digging a mine and laying their powder, with unwearied diligence, to blow up the conſtitution,

* The *regium donum* was the ſum of 10,000*l.* annually given to the Diſſenters by the Brunſwick family, which, it is ſaid, Lord Bute withdrew, among his other impolitic and violent meaſures.

ſtitution, and to batter it in ruins about our ears.

Indeed, at preſent, I fear not theſe menaces. They are, as I hope, rather the boiſterous bravadoes of impotent rage, than the cool language of conſcious ſtrength. The true general proceeds as ſecretly as he can by ſap, and wiſhes not to diſcover his mine but in the exploſion.

But pray, Sir, conſider; what muſt be the event of theſe things, if not early and vigorouſly oppoſed? Who can ſay a fortreſs is in perfect ſecurity, when it is attacked on all ſides, by ſap and battery, with unremitting fury, by a foe who has already declared in words, what he now ſpeaks in the ſtronger language of hoſtile actions, that he means nothing but havock and deſolation? *

The repeal of the Teſt, I ſhall now ſhow, will be ſoon productive of this fatal event.

It

* Wollaſton's idea, that actions have a language; generally a clearer and honeſter language than words. Where a man talks of love of his country, and acts inconſiſtently with its deareſt intereſts, we ſoon determine whether of the two to believe, his words or actions.

Were not the Layman a very inconſiſtent writer, we ſhould be ſurpriſed to find the authority of the *American* Franklin quoted on his ſide. It revives an idea that is painful to every true Briton's mind, that the general body of the Diſſenters were abettors, if not fomentors, of a convulſion which had nearly ruined the parent ſtate.

It is well-known, that the Boroughs ſend up a great majority of members into the Houſe of Commons; it is as well known, that the Diſſenters have a ſecret ſuperiority of influence in many boroughs, deprived as they are, by the Corporation-Act, of the adſcititious aids of power and influence.* Part of this intereſt indeed is their juſt right from perſonal talents and conſequence in trade; part however flows from their peculiar policy, addreſs, and art of accommodation to the complexion of men and times. But however it ariſes, we ſee the neceſſity of continuing this reſtrictive ſtatute: the cauſe remaining, the law ſhould ſtill remain; for *evil ſpirits* (as the act expreſſes it) *are ſtill working*.

It had been long over with the conſtitution had no teſts been in force. What ſecretly chagrines the Diſſenting Miniſters, I imagine, is, that theſe acts hurt their intereſts;† that occaſional conformiſts, acknowledging (as they ought to do) ſome

* The Layman acknowledges this, p. 71.

† I ſay this upon the Layman's authority rather than my own knowledge. He ſo ſays and unſays, to anſwer preſent purpoſes, that there is little dependence upon him without ſome collateral evidence. Sometimes he ſays the influence of the Diſſenters is great, at other times he laments its decreaſe ſince the revolution.

ſome reſpect to the eſtabliſhment to which they ſubmit, gradually drop their old connexions; melt down into the maſs of the community, and are loſt to the party. It may be ſo; and in that caſe muſt be a grievance. But hence a very important concluſion ariſes. It ſhould be a reaſon with our legiſlators, why theſe acts ſhould continue for the preſervation of the conſtitution; and the Diſſenting Miniſters, in the mean time, ſhould be contented, becauſe the rank ſoil of human nature, and the foſtering warmth of liberty will raiſe them up ſufficient ſwarms to teaſe and diſturb the conſtitution, and to ſupport their oppoſition.

But we are to ſee, how a repeal is to operate in corporations. Whether a repeal of the 5th of George I. makes a part of Mr. Beaufoy's motion, I know not: but it muſt ſoon follow of courſe. And then Jack may mount his great horſe and eat cuſtard at full liberty: That outrage againſt order, committed by a Diſſenting Lord Mayor of London (mentioned before, and ridiculed by Swift under the above image, and meant to be checked in future by the forementioned act of George I. this, I ſay,) will *then* be authorized: the mace will be carried in triumph to the Meeting-houſe: the party

party will immediately aſſume new ſpirits. Here will be two or more co-ordinate powers. And in the ſtruggle (which will of courſe take place) for the aſcendency and the command of the Borough, what chance can the members of the Church have againſt thoſe two cries, which have ſo often maddened this nation, *Popery* and *Slavery?* For the Diſſenters, at this very day, in defiance of decency as well as truth, find Popery, not only in the Liturgy and ſimple ceremonies of our Church, but in her Creeds and Articles, which their forefathers generally conſidered as unexceptionable.* The cry then, we may ſuppoſe, will be loud and perſevering. You know what this cry has done lately.† You may imagine what it will do again, under the conduct of jugglers, accuſtomed to raiſe political ſtorms at will; eſpecially as they will be then emboldened and backed with power to give weight and credit to their deceptions. *Perhaps* ſubmiſſion to government may be repreſented as ſlavery. *Perhaps* the cry may then be, "The influence of

* Charged home in that very candid book, The Confeſſional.

† Lord George Gordon's tumult.

" Lords* and great men muſt be ex-
" tirpated; the oppreſſion of taxes, un-
" der which we labour, under which
" trade and commerce languiſh, muſt be
" removed. Liberty will never be upon
" its proper foundations, until theſe are
" lowered or annihilated. The poor muſt
" have his quart of beer at three half-
" pence, and his ſix-penny loaf at two
" pence. If you will but chooſe pro-
" per perſons, theſe enormous burthens
" ſhall be removed. Every Engliſhman
" ſhould be free."

I know little or nothing of electioneering arts. But whatever arts have been or can be invented, may be expected from the ſhrewd ingenuity and unconquerable perſeverance of the party. And, when theſe cries, intrigues, and cabals are exerciſed in all the Boroughs, where there are any Diſſenters, (and in what trading places are they not to be found, though a few, comparatively ſpeaking, yet a politic, intriguing, buſtling few?) you may imagine what a *majority* of determined enemies to the eſtabliſhment will do, when they work their way into Parliament. Nor are our fears to be confined

* The Layman calls Lords *the hereditary friends of* DESPOTISM.

confined to Boroughs; there are ſome counties too, I am informed, where ſuch arts may be exerciſed with advantage.

One of the hardſhips now found in the Teſts is, that only *unprincipled* Diſſenters (I ſhould rather call them *pacific* Diſſenters) can get into power in the preſent ſtate of things; and that the *conſcientious* are kept out, and labour under a kind of perſecution. But this is the very reaſon why they ſhould be kept out: for this very conſcientious abhorrence of the Church's innocent (they call it her popiſh) complexion, will of courſe render them the enemies of the eſtabliſhment, and make them (if they have any *conſiſtency*) its ſubverters, when a proper opportunity preſents itſelf to their wiſhes.

The Houſe of Commons holds the purſe of the nation; and, if they will not hold and gripe it faſt, until they have gained their ends of the other two branches of the legiſlature, though our navy ſhould rot, the army diſband, and an enemy were hovering upon our coaſts; they are not the true deſcendants of thoſe people, who have convulſed theſe kingdoms for theſe two hundred years with unremitting perſeverance, under various forms, upon different pretences, adapted

to the complexion and temper of times, as they varied in the natural viciſſitude of human affairs. To guard againſt ſuch evils is not (as I have ſaid before) perſecution, but ſelf-preſervation.

The conſequences of a general convulſion, I ſhall now ſhow, will be fatal to the intereſts of the Proteſtant religion, at leaſt in this kingdom.

I am ready to give the Diſſenters credit for a very ſtrong, I had almoſt ſaid, a violent blind zeal againſt Popery. But it bears not a queſtion among intelligent and candid men, whether they have not ſerved it, more than they have hurt it, by the exceſſes of their antipathy.

I will not inſiſt upon their error of diſcarding many things among the Papiſts, which have the authority of primitive uſage and of Scripture; on which ſubjects the Papiſts will always have the advantage of argument on their ſide. This would be leading you into the thorny field of theological ſquabbles. I ſhall therefore take an eaſier and ſhorter way.

The tyranny of the Pope had been ſo exorbitant before the reformation, that Chriſtian princes would gladly have ſhaken off his yoke, had they not been alarmed at the exceſſes of thoſe reformers, whom our Engliſh Diſſenters follow, the Baptiſts

Baptiſts in Germany, and the Calviniſts in France and other places. The cool and well-informed Baron Puffendorf* acquaints us, that the umbrage they gave the civil powers by their levelling doctrines, was among the leading cauſes that obſtructed that great æra of human improvement, the Reformation. Queſtionleſs, in that age, the ſyſtem of equilization was premature. In this too, I ſuppoſe, it muſt be ſo: It always muſt be ſo as long as human follies and corruptions require government and ſubordination.

The Inquiſition, indeed, in Spain and other places, was the great inſtrument of ſupporting the Pope's tottering throne; but it was the umbrage given the civil powers, that induced Chriſtian princes to erect this ſavage engine of deſpotiſm among their ſubjects. It will be ſaid indeed (for it has been ſaid) that the preſent Diſſenters are not anſwerable for the exceſſes of their forefathers. But, if they have dropped their fanaticiſm, it does not appear yet, that they have renounced their republican ideas of church and civil diſcipline.

It is hard to ſay preciſely, what the Diſſenters aim at in the demolition of the preſent

* Introduction to the Hiſtory of Europe, on the Pope's ſpiritual monarchy.

preſent eſtabliſhment. The idea of the moſt moderate among them, I believe, is, that religious miniſters ſhall have certain and ſufficient proportions of the national wealth aſſigned and fixed by law, but that the people who pay rates in the ſeveral diviſions or pariſhes, ſhall pay them to ſuch teachers of any perſuaſion, as they themſelves ſhall approve and elect into the office. The other, I think, is, that all fixed proviſions for religious teachers ſhall ceaſe, and that ſuch perſons, as their own conceit, or ambition, or whim, or intrigue, or cunning, or indigence ſhall turn into preachers, ſhall be at liberty to follow theſe or any other licentious impulſes, and that ſuch collections as they can draw out of the pockets of their hearers, ſhall be their ſupport.*

How they can reconcile their ſchemes to the feelings of a very great multitude through the nation, thoſe who have legal exemptions from tithes, and thoſe who have hereditary patronages, or have given

* It is impoſſible to know the Layman's meaning; p. 50 he ſays, the magiſtrate ſhould provide for the maintenance of ſome eſtabliſhed ſyſtem for the purpoſe of inſtruction. In the next paragraph he doubts whether two or more ſhould not be eſtabliſhed. Yet, p. 58, he ſays, the Diſſenters have no form of church diſcipline to propoſe; p. 60, they are all Independents, *i. e.* for congregational worſhip.

Quo teneam nodo mutantem Protea vultum?

given valuable conſiderations for benefices in the way of fair purchaſe, this I neither know nor care. Neither will they care: for wherever they can act as they pleaſe, they act with a high hand; inflexible and unrelenting in their meaſures. But what I would wiſh to obſerve (did it not exceed all the powers of deſcription which I poſſeſs) is the confuſion and diſorder which muſt ariſe, when the pretended miniſters of grace and peace will be obliged to ſcheme, and plot, and cabal, and rail againſt each other for the godly purpoſe of getting and keeping diſciples, and by that means a neceſſary ſubſiſtence; and when their diſciples will be diſputing and ſquabbling about the comparative merits of their reſpective teachers; when every man will be at liberty to have a religion of his own or none at all, juſt as humour, or intereſt, or paſſion, or convenience inclines him, when ſeparations will multiply without end, when family will be againſt family, and member againſt member. The ſcene is even beyond my power of imagination. The religious inſtinct *will* not, *cannot*, be baniſhed out of human nature; for the bulk of mankind will have ſome religion or other: but certainly its true ſpirit, amidſt this colliſion of contending views,

thwarting

thwarting intereſts and jarring opinions muſt be entirely baniſhed from our country. A fine field for the growth of Popiſh ſuperſtition.

We may be aſſiſted a little in our conceptions, if we but recollect, from indiſputable hiſtory, what happened in the laſt century, in circumſtances ſomewhat ſimilar, though not quite ſo favourable to univerſal confuſion.* We may be aſſiſted a little more, by obſerving the diſorders occaſioned by our modern ſoul-ſaving adventurers, the Methodiſt-preachers. I am told that many decent and reſpectable men among the diſſenting miniſters have felt and acknowledged the evil in their ingenuous moments. But the evil is unavoidable. Liberty of conſcience is a privilege which muſt never be abandoned. Where can we place coercion with ſafety? The Pope has pretty well convinced us, by long and woeful experience, that his infallibility is not to be truſted. The civil magiſtrate has no *poſitive* power (I cannot with the Diſſenters ſay *no* power) over conſcience. Miniſters of religion muſt not call in the ſecular arm; for they will abuſe it; and the

* The Preſbyterians kept up ſome diſcipline, until the Independents overturned them, and threw all things into confuſion.

the people will not uſe coercion againſt themſelves.

An eſtabliſhment with a toleration is the only conceivable mode of ſupporting ſomething of true religion in the preſent degenerate ſtate of nature; and, indeed, is the ſyſtem, pointed out by the founder of our religion: For he has given the outlines of a viſible church in the ſacraments and ſucceſſive order of miniſters which he has inſtituted, and has taught us toleration in the univerſal charity which he has inculcated. Theſe miniſters are the guardians of its purity; the civil powers the patrons of its peaceful ſupport. And this connexion gives it ſtability and efficiency. It forms, as it were, its *ſtaminal* ſtrength, which peccant humours and accidental diſeaſes may, indeed, occaſionally diſturb, but cannot, without great neglect, effectually deſtroy, and may perhaps eventually improve. Or it is like Virgil's tempeſt-beaten rock:

> Quæ ſeſe, multis circum latrantibus undis,
> Mole tenet: ſcopuli nequicquam et ſpumea circum
> Saxa fremunt, laterique illiſa refunditur alga.

When the ſtate (for I cannot help dwelling upon the pleaſing image) has no other views but to form virtuous,

peaceable citizens, when the church makes religion the handmaid of virtue, and the promoter of ſocial comfort and order, and the majority of a country have the ſenſe and humility to accept of evangelical purity and political convenience in happy union; the commonwealth muſt be ſafe: The ſtorms and tempeſts, raiſed by fanaticiſm, or a zeal for ideal ſchemes of purity, will do but a little temporary miſchief: they will ſpend themſelves by degrees: the weather will clear up; and all will be ſerene again.

> If chance the radiant ſun with farewell ſweet
> Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,
> The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds
> Atteſt their joy, that hill and valley rings.

In the diſunited, diſcordant ſtate, to which our adverſaries wiſh, as it ſeems, to bring this nation, Popery is ſure to grow and increaſe. DIVIDE ET IMPERA is the great maxim of the Roman Pontiff. He got his temporal juriſdiction, in the darker ages, by making the wicked ambition of one prince the inſtrument of his purpoſes againſt another; and thus, with the policy of his anceſtors the old Romans, bringing the conquered and conquerors alike under one common yoke. And, though

though his temporal juriſdiction, ſo iniquitouſly got, is now greatly diminiſhed, yet his ſpiritual dominion has kept its ground, and is rather increaſing.* There is ſcarce a Proteſtant country, where he has not a very conſiderable body of the people at his devotion. I have ſeen a Popiſh book, lately publiſhed, which calculates his adherents in theſe kingdoms at two millions. Their proportion is greater in other Proteſtant countries upon the continent. He has great reſources of power and wealth in his own territories, and in the countries ſtill dependent upon him. He maintains ſwarms of miſſionaries, whom he has the impudence to ſend into Proteſtant countries, as into lands of Paganiſm, to propagate the faith: Theſe are under the moſt ſolemn ties of allegiance to him: The people are taught to depend upon them; they depend upon the Pope; and the Pope has not yet ſeparated his temporal and ſpiritual pretenſions. The diſunion of Proteſtants, and their own union with the Catholic Church, or, rather, their impudent pretence of being *the* Catholic Church, is their principal and moſt prevailing argument; our Diſſenters aid it by maintaining Proteſ-

* Puffendorf's Obſervation. Introduct. to Hiſt. of Europe.

taniſm to be perfecter in proportion as it recedes the more from Rome.*

This is the effect of our preſent *partial* diſſenſions. What greater miſchief to the cauſe of true religion may be expected hereafter, if we fall into a *total* ſtate of diſunion, when our houſe is *fundamentally* divided againſt itſelf, will be eaſily inferred from the ſucceſs of the ſame hoſtile cauſe amidſt the confuſions of the laſt century (when it was very great, Popiſh prieſts having inſidiouſly mixed themſelves with the itinerant goſpel preachers) and from the natural efficiency of cauſes.

Diſſenting writers, therefore, cannot be ſerious, when they talk of giving this growing ſpirit of *real* Popery a complete toleration, and yet declaim ſo loudly and vehemently againſt the *imaginary* Popery of our church; which moſt foreign Proteſtants have ever looked up to, as their firmeſt bulwark againſt Rome. It is one of thoſe ſpecious arguments, mentioned in the beginning of this letter, calculated only to ſerve a preſent purpoſe;

* A curious inſtance of this may be ſeen in Sir W. Meredith's letter, given us by the Layman, p. 98. "The "only difference (ſays he) that ſubſiſts between Proteſtants "is, who are the fartheſt removed from Popery" A ſtrange criterion of Chriſtian Sects! Are we then to have no poſitive principles?

poſe; and it is no breach of charity to call ſuch an argument, where the ſplay-foot of diſſimulation ſo plainly glares, nothing but grimace and colluſion.

The determination, therefore, of true policy, in the preſent ſituation of things, is that old one againſt papal encroachments; *Nolumus leges Angliæ mutari* (the fatal effects of neglecting which ſhould be a warning to us againſt the preſent intended incroachments;) or, if we muſt have any new acts of legiſlation with reſpect to religion, the encouragement of it as a practical ſyſtem of civil and moral duties (as I propoſe now laſtly to ſhow) is the only object becoming the attention of a wiſe legiſlature.

Intolerance has been the curſe of the world; and it never will nor can truly improve, till mankind are brought to make the great goſpel duty, *benevolence*, not a ſtrict coincidence of *faith*, their bond of union. And it belongs to you, Stateſmen, to forward this golden æra, which alone can humanize man and civilize ſociety. It is not to be expected from any miniſters of religion. *Prieſts of all religions are the ſame*, ſays Dryden, with his uſual coarſe ſtrength of expreſſion upon ſubjects of his diſlike. This at leaſt muſt be allowed; they uniformly

formly ſupport their own ſyſtems; partly from ſecret conſiderations of intereſt, which no man can wholly lay aſide, and partly from an habitual familiar acquaintance with their own peculiar modes and notions, and ignorance of thoſe of others, which beget prejudice. Different ſects too, in the ſame country, fall under this character: They have their difference of intereſts and prejudices, and theſe will beget mutual diſtaſtes, contentions, and ſquabbles.

One religion or ſect, to be ſure, may be purer than another, and freedom of diſſent and diſcuſſion will enable their adherents to ſettle their reſpective merits at their full eaſe: But that religion which makes moſt for peace, and allows moſt latitude of faith with reſpect to thoſe frivolous or abſtract points of theology, which have hitherto ſet ſects by the ears, is the moſt likely to bring on a general ſpirit of candor and forbearance, and beſt deſerves the legiſlator's and magiſtrate's protection and patronage.

And as this, I preſume, is the preſent ſtate of the Church of England, the proper reply to the advocates of the propoſed repeal ſhould run, I conceive, ſomewhat to the following purpoſe:

" We

" We ſhould be happy to ſee you en-
" joy every privilege of your native coun-
" try, for which your ſtations and talents
" qualify you, in common with your
" fellow-citizens. But the vehemence
" which appears in the conduct of your
" miniſters upon this occaſion, gives a ſuſ-
" picious aſpect to the meaſure, which
" alarms the miniſters of the eſtabliſh-
" ment. Both of you, undoubtedly, have
" your oppoſite rights and intereſts; and
" between both of you it becomes us to
" keep a fair and impartial balance.

" All ſtates in the world have thought
" ſome religious eſtabliſhment neceſſary.
" None of your writers have even at-
" tempted to ſhow that one is unneceſ-
" ſary in this country: and two co-or-
" dinate eſtabliſhments muſt be ſoon de-
" ſtructive of all peace and order. In
" this ſituation of things we wiſh not
" to try hazardous experiments: nothing
" but a ſtrong and obvious neceſſity juſ-
" tifies innovations.

" We wiſh to ſerve you; but we can-
" not ſerve you at the expence of others.
" The eſtabliſhed miniſters have the right
" of *poſſeſſion*, of which we cannot di-
" veſt them without injuſtice, until they
" forfeit it by miſconduct. Could we
" unite and ſerve you both, it would be

" our

" our duty and happineſs: For, though
" your mutual emulation profits the ſtate,
" your union would profit it more.

" It is ſuſpected that you have farther
" views. Certainly, encroachments are
" commonly gradual in their progreſs;
" and it is the part of wiſdom to check
" them in their firſt ſtage, or rather in
" their firſt appearance. Some of your
" writers have publicly declared, that
" they have farther views and larger de-
" mands. Go, then, and hold your con-
" greſſes and committees of correſpond-
" ence once more, and determine what
" will ultimately ſatisfy you now, in the
" year 1790; and how long, beyond this
" year, preſent conceſſions will ſatisfy
" you.

" You ſay, you cannot receive the ſa-
" crament in the eſtabliſhed church, to
" qualify you for civil offices, as it is a
" profanation of a religious ordinance to
" a ſecular purpoſe: If ſo, the profana-
" tion is your fault, for all good men
" agree, that religion ſhould conſecrate
" the commoneſt actions of our lives.
" If you object to the mode of the eſtab-
" liſhed church, you diſgrace your pro-
" feſſed liberality of ſentiments; as the
" only difference between you and the
" church lies in the mere trifling cir-

" cumſtance

" cumſtance of bodily poſture. If you
" diſlike it as an engagement not to
" hurt the religion of your country, you
" judge right indeed; for it is ſuch an
" engagement, and a call, at the ſame
" time, upon your conſciences as moral
" agents: but if you diſlike ſuch an en-
" gagement, you muſt bear the conſe-
" quence; the church and ſtate being ſo
" interwoven and united, that they muſt
" ſtand or fall together. If you diſlike
" it as a part of a conſtitution which
" you diſlike in *other* reſpects, here too
" you muſt take the conſequence of your
" diſſent; for you divide upon curious
" metaphyſical points of theology, upon
" which we will not determine, and wiſh
" a forbearing ſpirit to prevail. You
" may be right, and you may be wrong;
" for very eminent men differ from you:
" You have often changed, and may
" again change your opinions upon theſe
" ſubjects, without the leaſt prejudice
" to the cauſe of virtue. Diſtruſt your
" judgments yet awhile, and aboliſh not
" tenets, which you may wiſh again to
" revive. The Church ſets you a fair
" example of moderation: ſhe exhibits
" her confeſſions indeed in conformity
" with other chriſtian churches; but ge-
" nerouſly leaves a latitude of interpreta-

" tation, and expects peace rather than
" a coincidence of opinion from her
" members.

" What we want most in this age is
" a spirit of piety and good morals. If
" you want any legal aids to diffuse these
" more generally among your people, if
" you want coercion to oblige them to
" reverence the sabbath, to attend your
" houses of worship, to listen to your
" instruction, to prepare good maxims
" and resolutions for the temptations
" and honest labours of the week; these
" you shall have in common with the
" established church, as far as coercion
" is compatible with the liberty of the
" subject, and the necessary occupations
" of human life. But soul-saving sys-
" tems, which turn upon speculative or
" mysterious points, which may be taught
" or omitted without any detriment to
" the interests of practical christianity,
" belong not to us; but that you should
" improve society with salutary instruc-
" tion and the light of good examples,
" is an object of real importance to us,
" and shall be our concern."

If, Sir, such an expostulation as the preceding will not satisfy our adversaries, I have one thing more to propose, as necessary to be done, before they are indulged

dulged with the repeal they wiſh. Candid churchmen, I think, do not contend, that their ſyſtem is abſolutely free from blemiſhes, and ſublimed to the higheſt ſtandard of perfection. No. But they are tied by law from making any changes in it; and I humbly conceive, that, before tender conſciences are relieved with regard to the myſterious points of theology, which are the preſent ſubjects of complaint, churchmen ſhould be releaſed from this legal reſtriction, ſo far as it can be done without hurting the main purpoſes of the act of uniformity. We have an excellent bench of Biſhops, many learned men diſperſed over the nation, and a general ſpirit of liberality diffuſed among all orders of the clergy. In ſuch a ſtate of things, there is ſcarce a doubt but that a Convocation would ſit and deliberate with temper. It is the proper place where a reform ſhould be propoſed and carried into execution; and great advantages might be expected from it. A general moderation, ſimilar to that which actuated our firſt reformers, and more enlightened by the experience of two enterpriſing improving centuries, would go a great way towards rendering our Liturgy an unexceptionable ſervice to moſt people of candor and judgment.

In the mean time our diſſenting brethren ſhould be entreated to think more favourably of *our* ſubmiſſion to the *religion of our country*. The frequent revolutions both of modes and tenets, which have prevailed among themſelves ſince the reformation,* ſhould be a proof to them, that perfection of ſyſtem is not to be expected in religion, any more than in other things adminiſtered by frail man; and that therefore ſome imperfections may be borne with patience; for to conſider them as ſolid objections againſt the general expediency of eſtabliſhments, as long as free enquiry is allowed, would be running into that man's error, who ſhould renounce all human ſociety, until he could regulate it according to his own ideas. They are like the other evils of life;

* The doctrines held by our preſent Methodiſts, with regard to a new birth, irreſiſtible grace, and the like, were the principles of the Diſſenters in the laſt century; and, very poſſibly, may be their creed again, as ſoon as they are tired with the Socinianiſm, which their great leaders are now teaching them, after trying all the intermediate ſtages between Calviniſm and this laſt mentioned groveling ſyſtem. The old light, which is increaſing among them, is deſigned to revive their old principles. In a few years probably the Methodiſts will be treading the ſame round. Is it not time for us to agree, that a *righteous, ſober, and godly life* is the main ſubſtance of true religion; and that it is of little conſequence, whether ſpeculative opinions, which admit of ſuch fluctuations, be or be not a part of a mild conſtitution, making peace and good morals its main terms of communion?

life; not to be tamely and blindly borne: we muſt cure or improve what we can, and bear the reſt.

For my part, I conſider that we have nothing but the outlines of an external church laid down in the goſpel, and that the eſtabliſhments of it were intended by its founder to be accommodated to the political conſtitution of every country. I can therefore acknowledge a juſt eſtabliſhment, as well at Geneva, where epiſcopacy is aboliſhed, as in England and Sweden, where it is retained, though I conſider the order indeed as more conſonant to ſome traces in ſcripture and to primitive uſage. A tolerant ſpirit can never prevail in Chriſtendom, until it becomes an acknowledged univerſal maxim, that every ſtate may, with the aid of religious miniſters, conſtitute ſufficient means of ſalvation to the pious worſhipper and virtuous liver; and that is, in other words, not until the Pope's power and even ſolemn mockery of thundering out annual anathemas againſt nations, exerting this inalienable right of ſovereignty, be baniſhed from the earth; and religious miniſters ceaſe to fetch ſoul-ſaving ſyſtems of impoſſible perfection from the inviſible world, to the utter diſturbance and convulſion of the preſent. True religion

ligion conſiders the duties of this as the beſt preparation for another.

I can, for my part, acknowledge imperfections in our Liturgy, and yet ſubmit to it with advantage. I can ſay my prayers, I hope, with acceptable devotion; though I perceive ſome tautologies ariſing from the preſent neceſſary practice of uniting ſeveral offices, which were originally deſigned to be diſtinct: I can read the Pſalms with improvement, though I ſee no reaſon why we ſhould have two different verſions, one in our Bible and another in our Prayer-book: I can and do honour and love my King; but I ſee no reaſon why he ſhould take up four petitions in ſo ſhort a ſervice as the Litany, and have another long one appropriated to him in the Communion: I believe the Trinity to be (though not a ſcriptural *word* yet) a ſcriptural *doctrine*; but I ſee no reaſon why the Athanaſian and even Nicene Creed might not reſt quietly at the end of the eighth article, both for the ſake of ſhortening the ſervice, and removing the ſcruples of many who believe the general doctrines therein contained, and acknowledge the explanations to be as juſt as human wit and language can furniſh, but think them not neceſſary

neceſſary to be put into every Chriſtian's mouth.

I ſee many other things, which, I conceive, want amendment; but as I can never expect any ſyſtem that entirely quadrates with my own ideas, I will complain indeed, but will not revolt againſt peace and order. This is the temper which I would wiſh to recommend. The too violent and boiſterous attacks of adverſaries have made the church adhere, like the old man in the fable, rather more ſtubbornly to her *cloke*, than ſhe otherwiſe would, I believe, have done.

As the *foibles* of our mother-church are tolerable, at leaſt, ſo I would laſtly obſerve, that there is nothing in her *revenues* too, which juſtly merits the envy or jealouſy of her adverſaries (for I muſt perſiſt in my firſt idea, and conſider ourſelves as engaged in an actual ſtate of contention) unleſs it be, that her revenues are not precarious, but aſcertained by law.

Little do our adverſaries know the hardſhips under which the clergy labour. I ſhall give a ſhort account of their caſe, as it was given me by a friend, upon whoſe veracity and honour I can depend.

" The endowment of the church, (he " ſaid) with that exorbitant and abſurd proportion

" proportion of national wealth,* the " TENTHS, has been the ruin of the " clergy.

" The laity were ſoon obliged to com- " pound, in the beſt manner they could, " with their *ſpiritual maſters*; and the " Pope, by degrees, beſtowed all the " beſt parts of the revenues upon his " *life-guards*, the religious orders;— " leaving the parochial clergy to ſubſiſt " upon the ſmaller and meaner dues; as " they well might: as theſe, together " with the lucrative produce of purgato- " ry, ſupernumerary merits, ſham mira- " cles, and other engines of prieſtly craft, " produced, in thoſe days of darkneſs " and impoſture, a very competent ſup- " port to an *unmarried* body of men.

" But, when the reformation diſperſed " theſe revenues among the laity, though " the meaſure was right, the mode was " wrong and fatal.

" The engines of prieſtly craft were " now taken away by the *honeſty* of the " Reformers. Compoſitions were be- " come *law* by cuſtom. From various " cauſes they multiplied to a great de- " gree, and extended to moſt branches of

* This is, in fact, about a *fifth*, as being the tenth of labour as well as produce. An enormous oppreſſion!

" of church revenues. Two or three
" weak ſucceſſions made a cuſtom. And
" hence they are ſtill extending and im-
" poveriſhing the order,

" The jealous laity are ever encroach-
" ing; the clergy generally acquieſcing
" in their uſurpations. Sometimes ho-
" neſt pride cannot ſtoop to many things
" on which their ſupport depends; too
" oppreſſive and odious to be levied on
" the poor, too ſmall and contemptible
" to be received at the diſdainful hands
" of the rich. Sometimes the juſteſt
" claims, which the impartial honeſty of
" law has ſtill preſerved to them, cannot
" be urged with ſafety to themſelves or
" profeſſional conſequence. The mo-
" ment a clergyman does this, the laity
" are all in arms: the avarice and ex-
" tortion of the clergy become a ſtand-
" ing topic. If menaces make him not
" ſubmit, powerful combinations ſhall
" harraſs him; intereſted verdicts ſhall
" oppreſs him: So that the moſt reſo-
" lute generally ſubmit from prudence,
" the modeſt and patient for peace.

" At the ſame time very fatal and un-
" chriſtian tempers ariſe from a diſpro-
" portion, thus begun and thus extend-
" ed. They, who have exemptions,
" laugh at thoſe who have none, and

" at the hireling parſon whom they ſup-
" port; and they, who ſupport him, re-
" luctantly as they do, murmur at this
" ſtrange inequality. In thoſe, contempt
" ariſes; in theſe, envy and diſlike; tem-
" pers equally unfitting men for the mild
" offices of religion.

" At the ſame time alſo, though the
" clergy, loaded as they are with theſe
" difficulties, cheerfully bear the burdens
" of the ſtate in common with other
" ſubjects, yet they have other hardſhips
" peculiar to themſelves; the heavy ex-
" actions,* which once went to Rome,
" and afterwards were annexed to the
" national revenues. They were indeed
" reſtored to the clergy by the wiſdom
" and piety of Queen Anne;† but they
" were only imperfectly reſtored. For
" the

* The firſt fruits and tenths; which, together with Peter-pence, went to Rome. And, if we add the revenues of biſhopricks, and benefices very often held by Italians, who never viſited them, and the vaſt ſums carried to Rome by appeals, and pilgrimages, and every other ingenious device of impoveriſhing the nation; it is hard to conceive how any money remained behind for the neceſſary purpoſes of life.

† It is for this reaſon, I ſuppoſe, that the layman ſneeringly calls her the *pious* Ann. Such a thing might drop properly enough from the pen of ſome libertine; but that a man who profeſſes, in an elaborate work, to reſcue religion from profanation, ſhould make piety the ſubject of a joke, is, to ſay the leaſt of it, ſtrange.

" the jealouſy of the laity ſtill inter-
" poſed, and reſtored them not to the
" right owners, the beneficed clergy, but
" appropriated them to the augmenta-
" tion of poor curacies; and rendered
" them alſo ſo ſlow and ineffective in
" their operation, that it will take an
" age at leaſt to bring poor livings to
" fifty pounds a year, and the fund re-
" mains a large accumulating maſs of
" wealth, to be employed perhaps by
" ſome godleſs king or miniſter, at ſome
" future time, as the inſtrument of ty-
" ranny or corruption.

" To theſe are added many other in-
" conveniences. From the very nature
" of their order their ſubſiſtence can be
" but temporary: from its importance,
" they are excluded from all ſecular ways
" of gain: from the expectations of the
" world they muſt live in ſome degree
" of elegant elevation, and ſome ſuperior
" habits of beneficence. Yet, while their
" incomes are become ſtationary or ra-
" ther decreaſing, the neceſſaries of life
" are forty-fold increaſed; and, while
" the chriſtian liberty of marriage makes
" them more innocent and uſeful, it
" makes them more neceſſitous.

" In conſequence of theſe things, the
" few who riſe to any opulence ſuitable

" to their rank, partly enjoy it by a great
" and neceſſary evil, lamented by them-
" ſelves, the *accumulation* of preferments,
" or partly by the *adventitious* aid of
" lay-inheritances or connexions, while
" the bulk of them, from their neceſ-
" ſary pride of rank and the unhappineſs
" of their circumſtances, live in a laud-
" able ſort of *ambitious poverty*, until
" death comes, till the great Revealer of
" Secrets comes and diſcovers what hard-
" ſhips they have patiently ſuffered;
" what greater evils they have inno-
" cently and virtuouſly entailed upon
" their helpleſs widows and orphans."

Many things might be added to this account; but this is enough to ſhow that the ſtate of the Church has nothing in it, when properly conſidered, to excite either the envy or jealouſy of the other orders of ſociety. Some have propoſed, as a remedy, an equalization of church livings; but, beſides other objections, I ſee not why different degrees are not as neceſſary in eccleſiaſtical as in political bodies. The only cure is an equal and impartial rate for the ſupport of religious miniſters, according to their degrees of neceſſary rank; but this cannot be expected. It cannot be done without the reſumption of moduſſes and pre-

ſcriptions;

ſcriptions; and many, very many, would rather ſee the whole profeſſion (Church and Diſſenting Miniſters alike) treated like the Knights Templar—totally extirpated—than ſuffer any alterations for their more comfortable ſubſiſtence—except it be at the *expence of one another*; an evil, which it is the buſineſs of this letter to deprecate.

I am, SIR,

Your very reſpectful

Humble Servant,

Dec. 24, 1789.*

A Country Freeholder.

* In the beginning of this month appeared the Reſolutions of the Suffolk Diſſenters. They have one new argument which requires notice, or rather the ſevereſt reprehenſion. They appeal to the preſent political diſputes in France. Good God! Do theſe people know what conſtitution *will* be finally eſtabliſhed in France? and, when one is eſtabliſhed, do they know *how* that will *operate* hereafter, either upon the internal peace and comfort of the kingdom, or upon the general intereſts of Europe?—It ſhould be conſidered by theſe people and their brethren, that *we* have been long ſince in poſſeſſion of that happy conſtitution which the French patriots *ſeem* to aim at; that the church has been ſtripped of its exorbitant claims and treaſures, and the King's prerogative limited and aſcertained, and that we cannot go lower, without becoming a mere Democracy. It is well our modern Revolutioniſts have diſcovered their views; for it is to be hoped, that there is ſtill ſtrength enough in the other orders to preſerve our well-balanced conſtitution.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 14, line 12, for *they* read it.
Ib. Note, line 14, for *expanſive* read *expenſive*.
Page 45, line 9, read *equalization*.
Page 52, read *Proteſtantiſm*.

Another *ſeeming* error: I ſee now, Jan. 4, 1790, that the Diſſenting Miniſters, aſhamed of their late bare-faced proceedings, have altered their manœuvres. They put ſome pragmatical layman into the chair, and endeavour to palm their preſent meetings upon the nation as the work of the Diſſenters in general, which is far from being the caſe. *Bellua multorum es capitum.*

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